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The best home cinema kit put to the test, plus gaming goodies and more hardware bits 'n' bobs – all in total Gear...

total Gear

Hardware reviews

Hardware reviews and features use the advanced testing equipment of the Highbury Tech Labs, balancing the subjective opinions of reviewers with objective technical tests. We don't tend to quote technical parameters such as jitter and chroma noise, but by measuring them and comparing them to averages we can set performance ratings. Our hardware tests and features cover DVD players, TV technology, home cinema amplifiers, video projectors, speakers, digital radio and multimedia equipment, PC and games console-based entertainment products and anything else we think will be of interest to DVD users. We score out of five for Ease of use, Connections, Performance and Value for money. Particularly good choices are awarded the *totalDVD* Best Buy.

Star Ratings:

Poor	✪
Fair	✪✪
Good	✪✪✪
Very good	✪✪✪✪
Excellent	✪✪✪✪✪

totalDVD BEST BUY

Akai LM-H30CJSA

Contact: 020 7887 7780 ■ www.akai-uk.com ■ ASP: £799

Everyone with any sense is now going flatscreen – and LCD is where it's at, with quality improving and prices dropping to the point where plasma just can't keep up. Akai's LM-H30CJSA is one of the most attractive propositions yet – a sensibly-sized 30in 16:9 widescreen LCD TV set at just a touch under £800, far less than you could expect to pay for a similar product from some other manufacturers.

The Akai might not be stunning to look at – basically it's a silver oblong with a fixed speaker on each side - but it certainly does the business in terms of facilities and performance. Sockets include Scart, composite video, S-video, component video, D-Sub and stereo audio in, and there's a headphone output socket.

Screen resolution is 1280x768 (WXGA), so the set can also function as a PC monitor using its D-Sub input. Although this resolution theoretically qualifies it as being high-definition compatible, the Akai lacks a digital video input so it can't carry the HD-Ready badge.

It does, though, have a wide range of everyday functions, including picture-in-picture, PC-in-picture, component input with progressive scan, PAL/SECAM tuner, automatic programming, Teletext and a full range of screen formats.

Built-in Nicam stereo sound is via a pair of 10W speakers, not earth-shattering but good enough for general TV viewing. The set can be rotated and tilted on its stand but also has a standard VESA grid for wall-mounting.

The 16million-colour display has a typical contrast ratio of 500:1, and a viewing angle of over 170º horizontal and vertical. We found the picture to be bright, colourful and lively; not the sharpest we have seen on a LCD display of this size, but generally watchable and not prone to any visible lag or smearing.

This isn't the set for you if you require a digital input for high-definition display, a built-in Freeview tuner or the like; but if you just want a flat screen that looks good without breaking the bank, look no further.

Total Verdict

Ease of use	✪✪✪✪
Performance	✪✪✪✪
Connections	✪✪✪
Value	✪✪✪✪
Overall	✪✪✪✪